

# Allan Duffin

**Irish immigrant, armed with letter of introduction, helped build area's first successful general store**

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It must have been frightening the day Allan Duffin left his homeland of Ireland bound for America, alone but carrying a letter of recommendation neatly folded in his jacket pocket. This letter was to be the key to his fortunes in America and he was not disappointed.

La Camas was a long way from Ireland, but a Scotsman, Aeneas MacMaster took him in like a son, giving him both employment and his daughter in marriage. This is the story of the Duffin family, their business, family and religious traditions, and the impact they have had on the Camas community right up to the present time.

Allan Duffin was born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1857. His parents, who were of strong Presbyterian stock, moved to Larne, Ireland, when Allan was small. They became industrious and respected members of the community, providing their son with a good education and a fine religious upbringing in Reverend McMurray's congregation.

Allan worked in an office in Belfast for awhile, then as a letter carrier for the postal service. In 1872, he left Larne, Ireland, with a letter of high recommendation, dated Oct. 1, 1872, from the R.P. Minister of Larne, Ireland, James R. Moody. Rev. Moody praises Allan as being a man of very great promise, strictly honest and perfectly trustworthy.

It is said that Allan spent some time in Canada before coming to Camas in 1883. And, the 11 year gap between leaving Ireland and arriving at the La Camas community would certainly support that assumption. Confident, handsome, Allan with his high credentials in hand, had no trouble landing a job with Aeneas MacMaster at the Pioneer Store. MacMaster, who at 53 was fresh from the Scottish Highlands via Montreal, had just opened the first general

store in town. The small, two-story wooden building had been constructed in record time, and the early La Camas settlers were excited at the prospect of having their own store. It had been difficult for Aeneas to leave his wife and family of nine children in Canada, while he traveled to the Western Territories to seek his fortune. But, once established in the new, bustling community of La Camas, he sent a telegram for the family to join him.

Aeneas, who was also a strong Presbyterian, felt lucky to find someone of Allan Duffin's fine character to help him in the store, and two worked side by side until the MacMaster family arrived.

Allan was pleasantly surprised to discover that one of Aeneas' children was a lovely daughter, 19-year-old Elizabeth MacMaster, born in Glasgow, Scotland, on Feb. 22, 1865. No sooner had she arrived in Camas, then she began teaching at a makeshift one-room school building, with an old cook stove for heat. Her first class had 28 pupils of all ages, some older than Elizabeth. Five of her pupils were her younger brothers and sisters.

Because of the close proximity of Allan's work at the store and the MacMaster's living quarters, Elizabeth and Allan spent a good deal of time together and their friendship soon turned to deeper feelings. In 1885, after a proper engagement and with happy blessings from her parents, they were married.

Elizabeth's parents, the elder MacMasters, had moved from the store building to a newly-constructed, but modest home at the top of Division Street on the hill. After Allan and Elizabeth were wed, they built their own residence across the street. The Duffin house, however, was much larger, and considered by townfolk as quite grand for those times.

In 1884, Allan joined the newly-formed LaCamas Presbyterian Church, which Aeneas MacMaster had started the year before. Allan was the seventh member of the congregation, and before long he was elected secretary of the building committee. His first assignment was to secure funding for a planned, new church building. The church services were currently being held in the store building, and with many new members interested in joining, there was a need for a decent church. The planned site for the new church was just

**ALLAN DUFFIN, born in Belfast, Ireland, left for America and eventually the new town of LaCamas in roughly 1872. He married Elizabeth MacMaster who is shown (below) with daughters Maysie and Marjorie in 1907.**



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